THE
Dan Smoot Report

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DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA JUNGLES

Public school conditions are perhaps worse in Washington, D. C., than in any other place. There is pathetic irony in this fact.

Sixteen years ago, the District had a dual school system: one division for whites, one for Negroes. Melvin Sharpe, then president of the District board of education, said that, under the dual system, there was "no discrimination whatsoever in the textbooks, the schools, buildings, teachers, and what-not." He said a very eminent and able Negro man was in charge of the Negro school division, and was doing an admirable job.(1)

At that time, the District school system (with a student population about two-thirds white, one-third Negro) was rated academically among the best in the nation.

On May 17, 1954, the Warren Court handed down its first school-desegregation decision. Praising the Court for that decision, President Eisenhower urged District of Columbia schools to hasten racial integration in order to make the capital city's school system a model for the nation. School officials complied immediately.(2)

The exodus soon began. Whites (including Members of Congress and of the Eisenhower administration who urged, and were prepared to force, school integration on others) began taking their children out of the District public schools. More Negroes began moving in.

Today, the District schools are almost wholly segregated again. Whites have left, and Negroes constitute about 92% of the total public-school enrollment.

Congress has appropriated huge amounts of tax money to provide new and improved facilities for the District schools; and a great deal more is spent on their operation than in 1954. For example, the District public schools have a greater number of professional staff per 1000 students than the schools of any other city of comparable size.(3)

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Yet, today, District of Columbia public schools are rated academically among the lowest in the nation, whereas they were among the best before the federal government forced upon them the socio-political ideas of Earl Warren, the NAACP, and the Communist Party.

Many District schools are now stews of crime and violence, where the educational process is virtually nonexistent. Assault, robbery of teachers at gunpoint or knife point, extortion and robbery of students, student use of narcotics, theft, burglary, and vandalism occur almost daily in the classrooms and hallways and on the playgrounds of Washington public schools. Now and then, there is a murder.

For example:

—In January, 1969, Herman Clifford, assistant principal at Cardozo High School, District of Columbia, was fatally shot when he tried to stop three boys who had just robbed the school bank of $350.00.[4] Two 17-year-old boys later pleaded guilty to participating in the robbery. They were acquitted of murder charges, and sentenced to juvenile institutions until their 21st birthdays. A third youth (Ronald Joyner, age 19) was arrested in September, 1969, and charged with first-degree murder.[5]

—On September 26, 1969, two boys committed armed robbery in a third-grade classroom at Monroe Elementary School in Washington. While holding a gun on the students, they stole a wallet belonging to the teacher, who was out of the room at the time.[4, 6]

—In September, 1969, Granville Woodson (Assistant Superintendent of District public schools, supervising maintenance of the grounds and 200 buildings in the system) said that thefts, vandalism, and break-in damage cost the school system more than $1 million in fiscal 1969. The biggest item was $477,000 for replacement of broken windows. Mr. Woodson predicted that loss in window breakage would decline, because unbreakable plastic windows were being installed.[4] Woodson estimated it would cost more than $1 million a year to protect all school buildings with armed guards, and said unarmed watchmen "had not helped much," because thugs overpower the watchmen. He said school officials had considered using dogs to protect school property, but feared that "somone would protest."[4]

—Vandalism to contractors' equipment drives up the cost of new school buildings in the District. Such equipment losses totaled $178,000 in fiscal 1969.[4]

—In Sepember, 1969, when preparing their 1970-71 budget, District school officials were considering installing "panic bars" on school doors, stationing policemen at strategic spots outside, and employing other methods to keep non-students out of the schools. They hoped to hire enough "community aides," or "crisis situation teachers," to patrol and protect the schools from student-hoodlums, leaving with police the responsibility of handling non-students.[4]

—On October 13, 1969, Abram Simon, 11-year-old pupil at a public elementary school in southeast Washington, D. C., created a disturbance in class. His teacher, 23-year-old Alan Banov, ordered him to leave the classroom. He left, but returned in a few minutes threatening the teacher with a broken bottle. Banov took the bottle away from him and shoved him into the hall. When Banov turned to reenter his classroom, the boy threw a knife at him. The long blade lodged in the upper part of his back. The teacher was rushed by ambulance to a hospital for emergency treatment. The boy was arrested and charged with assault.[7]

—On October 24, 1969, half of the teachers in MacFarland Junior High School (Washington, D. C.) walked off their jobs, claiming they were in physical danger from students.[8]

On October 28, 1969, U. S. Representative Albert Watson (ranking Republican member of the House Crime Committee) demanded that National Guard troops be assigned to protect students and teachers in District of Columbia public schools unless school authorities stop "coddling the classroom criminal."

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Representative Watson said:

"A teacher in the Washington area public schools does not dare turn his or her back on the classroom for fear of being attacked. Violence in the D. C. schools is so widespread that teachers and students alike are more concerned with self-preservation than education. . . .

"Discipline of unruly and . . . classroom criminal types vanished long ago in D. C. schools. . . .

"It may not be a pretty sight to have armed troops guarding every phase of a school's activity . . . however, it is far more preferable than. . . . students and teachers . . . [continuing] to be the victims of senseless violence and . . . death, as we have already seen on a number of occasions."[9]

School officials and the Mayor of Washington rejected the idea of using the National Guard to patrol the public schools, and conditions continued to grow worse.

On December 15, 1969, a student was shot in a rest room at Anacostia High School. On that occasion, it was publicly revealed that doors at the school were locked with chains, in violation of fire-safety regulations. The principal and other school officials were criticized. A group of students met with the board of education, defending the principal, explaining that only the front doors were locked with chains. The president of the student council said:

"The primary reason for locking the doors at Anacostia is to keep outsiders out, not to keep the students in. How can we have an institution of learning when there is so much confusion caused by outsiders."[10]

After Christmas holidays, four "gun incidents" were reported in four District schools, on one day — January 5, 1970: (1) 15-year-old Tyrone Perry was shot and killed by another student on a stairwell in Hine Junior High School. This was reported as an accident, but a youth was charged with homicide. (2) A 14-year-old student was shot in the hip while he and a friend were playing with a gun in a school corridor. (3) A 15-year-old student was shot at twice on a school playground by a gang of youths demanding that he give them his coat. (4) Police took a gun away from a 16-year-old student.[11]

The city's library director announced that he will be forced to close branch libraries unless student disorder, theft, and vandalism are controlled.[11]

One school board member predicted that the problem of violence and crime in the city's public schools will "get a lot worse before it gets any better." Mattie Taylor, another school board member, reflected the view of many parents who are fearful for their children's safety in the schools. Miss Taylor said:

"If we can't come up with a program in two weeks, maybe we should close down the schools and let the children stay home with their parents until the situation improves."[12]

Reluctantly, the mayor of Washington ordered police to patrol all 46 of the District's junior and senior high schools, and 24 of its elementary schools. He also authorized the hiring of 80 civilian (that is, unarmed) "community aides" to patrol school hallways.[13] The mayor instructed the school board to produce its own plan for security and safety in the schools, as soon as possible.

On January 13, 1970, the District school board's safety committee proposed a $3.5 million program to curb violence in the public schools. The proposals included the hiring of an additional 500 "community aides" to patrol school hallways; installation of a new type lock on classroom doors; installation of more security alarm systems; issuance of student identification cards.[13]

On January 19, 1970, the chairman of the school safety committee said the security proposals made on January 13 could cost as much as $6 million, instead of the original $3.5 million estimate. He acknowledged that no decision had yet been made about measures to protect the schools. The mayor of Washington said he would keep police

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in or near the schools for at least three more weeks.[14]

U. S. Representative John Dowdy (Texas Democrat, chairman of a special investigating subcommittee of the House District Committee) revealed that his committee will soon begin an investigation of violence in the District schools. He said:

"The elected school board seems to have no interest in straightening that out."[14]

Here, verbatim, is a paragraph from Legislative Report No. 1052, February 18, 1970, written by U. S. Representative H. R. Gross (Iowa Republican):

"In Washington's Taft Junior High School last week a young male student enticed a 14-year-old girl backstage in the school's deserted auditorium. Five other young male animals were waiting. The six beat the girl into submission, and then each of them raped her. Are the courts demanding the busing of children to schools or zoos?"

Conditions in the Washington schools reflect, of course, conditions in the city itself. Washington is the *federal* city, where all laws, courts, rules, and enforcement are *federal.*

It was *federal* decisions to implement the illicit decision of the *federal* Supreme Court that produced present conditions in the city of Washington, and in its schools.

In 1954, when urging upon the Washington school system instant implementation of the Supreme Court's school desegregation decision, President Eisenhower said he wanted the system to become a model for the rest of the country.

It has become a model — of the jungle that total federal control produces.

This is a significant fact to keep in mind at this time, when federal officials are illegally using the power and taxing resources of the federal government to force upon the rest of the country *federal* notions of how schools should be run.

LATER: More on the school problem.

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This is my annual reminder to all of you who wish to share this expense. I am profoundly grateful to you who help carry this load, no matter the size of your contribution.

FOOTNOTES

(1) Transcript of Hearings, House subcommittee investigation of integration in District of Columbia public schools, Sept. 19, 1956
(2) "Ike's Model School System," *Dan Smoot Report*, Oct. 15, 1956
(3) *U. S. News & World Report*, May 6, 1968, pp. 72-73
(4) Washington *Sunday Star*, Sept. 28, 1969
(5) Washington *Evening Star*, Jan. 6, 1970
(6) AP, Jan. 14, 1970
(7) Washington *Evening Star*, Oct. 14, 1969
(8) AP, Oct. 26, 1969
(9) Press release, Oct. 28, 1969
(10) Washington *Evening Star*, Dec. 18, 1969
(11) AP, Jan. 14, 1970; Washington *Evening Star*, Jan. 16, 1970
(12) Washington *Sunday Star*, Jan. 11, 1970
(13) Washington *Evening Star*, Jan. 13, 16, 1970
(14) Washington *Evening Star*, Jan. 20, 1970

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